

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is defined succinctly by Beyer in Potts as “the ability and tendency to gather, evaluate, and use information effectively.”

As we have pretty much discussed in our classes, Potts outlines a few ‘recognisable’ hallmarks of teaching for critical thinking:

- promoting interaction amongst students as they learn
- open-ended questions
- sufficient time to think about the questions posed
- teaching for transfer.

Potts outlines three strategies for teaching critical teaching skills.

1. *Building Categories* – here she emphasizes the need for teachers to encourage students to discover rules rather than memorise the as long-term this can result in better understanding and better retention of concepts
2. *Finding Problems* – here teachers should frame tasks in such a way so that students are using skills similar to what they may need to use if they encounter problems in real life
3. *Enhancing the Environment* – an important one. Teachers are encouraged to do two things here. One is to rearrange setting in the classroom so that teachers and students are interacting together, and two, classroom visual aids should be present to encourage ongoing attention to critical thought processes.

Brenner and Parks looked at cultural influences on critical thinking and problem solving. They characterised critical thinking as “favoring a masculine, instrumental, logical –rational, linear, objective, and Eurocentric viewpoint.” However, they said that what may be perceived as effective critical thinking in one culture may not be judged so in another. They then looked at an individualistic v. a collectivistic culture. Here are some of the key differences:

Individualistic	Collectivistic
Esteem the person as an individual	Fosters a sense of self as interrelated and interdependent with others
Fosters an autonomous self and self-esteem derived from what a person does or accomplishes	Goals and values that serve the in-group are stressed along with mutual obligations and shared responsibility
Rely upon personal guilt for social control	Violating group harmony may be punished, often by shame
Fosters a ‘low-context’ communication style, which values direct self-expression, clarity and speaking one’s mind freely in a climate of competitiveness	Expected to listen and infer the speaker’s intention from what is not explicitly said Communication is ‘receiver-oriented’
‘I’ rather than ‘we’	‘Saving face’

These cultural differences have implications for educators especially as most educators in Western schools tend to be from a similar culture – White, middle-class, Christian and so on. The authors say that adding collectivist decision making practices to students' thinking repertoires will address each of Banks's suggested five dimensions of multicultural education: content integration, knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy and an empowering school culture and social structure.